

Honorable Judge Jackson,

It is with my deepest regret to be in a position to write this letter. No words can convey the remorse I have for my victims and their families. I would be remised if I didn't include the pain and hardship I bestowed my family, my community, and the Air Force. I understand my actions have caused a great deal of pain to all involved and I will bare the burden of regret until my last day. I will continue to ask God for his forgiveness, to heal the pain I have caused, and to mentally prepare me for the consequences deemed appropriate by the court.

As each day goes by, I try to grasp rational answers for why I did what I did but continue to come up short of any reason. Prior to my incarceration I led a fulfilling life with my wife, children, family, and friends. A few weeks prior to my arrest I was approved for retirement and would be ending my career on February 1, 2023, a date that has since passed, and a dream that has since been derailed. For my crime, losing out on a lifetime of benefits for my family and myself is a tough pill to swallow, however, more importantly, losing out on time with my wife and children is even harder to bare. My world that revolved around providing them with security, health care and a future they could look forward to when I retired is now lost because of what I have done.

Throughout my life I was blessed to have a family that loved me. Growing up I was always well liked, respected, and loved by those I came in contact with. My step-father was on active duty with the Air Force, so we moved around quite a bit. When I was in high school in Arizona, there was a lot of drug and gang activity, but I was able to avoid that. I never tried a drug, or joined a gang, and knew from 15 I would follow my stepdad's footsteps and join the service. For the last 19 + years I gave my all to the Air Force, stateside and overseas, and excelled in four different career fields, 10 different units, and five total assignments. Along the way I managed to obtain two associates, one bachelor's, and a master's degree. In 2007, I volunteered for my first deployment to Iraq and upon return I was redeployed to Iraq seven months later. I learned to lead and care about people. Despite much adversity and applied pressure, my ongoing career was almost impeccable. At the peak of my career, I was entrusted to be the wing's Career Assistance Advisor and elected by my peers as the president of the wing's Top Three Organization (E7-E9).

Looking back at my nearly 20-year career with the Air Force, I can't ignore the fact that two very difficult combat assignments I had in Iraq in 2007 and 2008, as well as my subsequent assignment as the Non-Commissioned Officer in charge of mishaps and investigations have forever changed my life.

In January 2007 I was assigned to Kirkuk Ab, Iraq. My role was to support the overly stressed security forces as an augmentee. I was responsible for the security of the locals that performed work on the installation. After a few weeks of providing escort and oversight of the workers, I was selected to move to perimeter defense and search pit operations. That job consisted of two main objectives, working in erected towers with binoculars and an M-16 providing oversight to members below, or being part of the searching operation of the vehicles and people entering the base to include the convoys coming and going from the coalition forces.

The main goal of the search pit was to ensure no car bombs were going to make a surprise and direct attack on our forces. On multiple occasions, I had to fire warning shots from the tower towards vehicles approaching that were not heeding to signs to slow down, flashlights, etc. On one occasion I had a boy approximately 13-14 years old that was approaching the installation waving what appeared to be a weapon in the direction of the troops beneath me. I scoped my sights directly between his eyes and gave a SALUTE report via radio. My direction was to shoot the boy if he presented a direct threat. As I instructed my guys to take cover I refocused on my target and felt my index finger shaking as I held it over the trigger, however the boy finally retreated. Many times over the years I have had a reoccurring dream of actually killing that boy, waking up in a cold sweat or waking myself up yelling. The dream has been as recent as to my lockup in here. My cellmates have heard me and gave me playback of their accounts of it.

While I was on duty at the search pit, I was exposed to inherent danger daily. Day after day new cars, trucks, and semis arrived with people and equipment. My job was to ensure the Iraq workers and their vehicles were cleared for entry to the base. Each vehicle posed the threat of carrying an IED. The language barrier made it difficult to communicate and the searches were intense. This led us to be taught to use force aggressively and often slamming people to the ground that failed to comply. Everyday presented a life or death situation. The entire time I spent in Iraq there was almost daily news of service members or civilians being killed or mauled by IED's. Another traumatic part of the job was seeing the innocent civilians, including children that were rushed to the gate with injuries sustained by small arms fire and I.E.D. detonations that were intended for American Forces. The sheer amount of blood, bones, guts, and tears of people are forever engrained in my soul. These were just a few of the challenges of working perimeter defense and not in the "safety" of the base.

The term safety is used rather lightly when in Iraq. While not working 12-14-hour days, we were housed in modular buildings with rooms for 10-12 people. The threat from sunset to sunrise was real. This is when the opposition would set off their mortar attacks. Without an automatic perimeter mortar defense, the explosions would haphazardly land all over the base forcing us to dawn protective gear and seek hardened shelter throughout the night. This made it difficult to get chow, shower, and most importantly get rest. Fatigue was an understatement. Day after day we would get news of another area hit, injuries sustained, property damage, etc. The closest encounter being a mortar that hit right outside our modular dorms, causing me to practically fall out of my bed and the room to shake fiercely from the blast. Shrapnel was sent into the concrete barrier protecting the rooms and caused damage to one of the Dodge Ram trucks I would frequently drive.

All in all, Iraq was a horrifying place to be as we lost 899 troops in Iraq in 2007 alone. Upon my return to the states, I quickly realized the change in who I was and the anger I had towards the war and what we were doing in Iraq, the news, and people who failed to grasp the gravity of this war. A good night's sleep became hard to come by as my body was programmed to react to noises which caused me paranoia. Loud, sudden noises would trigger me to jerk and react differently. Flashbacks and emotional breakdowns were far too common. I wanted out of

the service, but the pressure of healthcare and job security led me to decide to stay in the service and eight months later I was deployed back to Iraq.

My next deployment to Iraq would be a bit different. This time I worked my primary job as a supply troop. My duty was to maintain and order the base's War Reserve Material. Approximately three weeks into my deployment my partner gave birth to my first child. Bitterness swelled as prior to deployment I pleaded to not go so I could be there for her birth. The mission took priority. The next four months the onslaught of mortar attacks continued. This time I was living in the warehouse I worked from that backed up to a graveyard/mosque. On one particular occasion a mortar round landed outside my warehouse and the explosion sent shrapnel into the connex boxes outside and the outer wall. I decided to keep a piece of the shrapnel as a trophy on my desk that was approximately 12-14 inches long as a reminder of the danger I faced daily.

Upon my return to my home station, I decided the only way I would continue to serve is if I was able to cross-train to another career field. Shortly after, I was selected to train into the Safety Career Field. After completion of training, I was assigned to be the Non-Commissioned Officer in charge of mishaps and investigations. My job was to participate in investigations in an effort to find cause to mishaps that resulted in injury and even death. Over the course of the next five years, I was a part of five fatality investigations meaning I was the person to conduct independent research on behalf of the Air Force in an effort to find a conclusive cause of death. This meant working with the local police, the coroner's office, as well as other local authorities. The hardest part was taking my own photos of the accident scene and interviewing family, friends, and coworkers of the deceased to gather facts about the member's last 72 hours. With this job I intended to escape the harsh reality of death, but yet it actually brought me closer to it. I often struggled with aspects of the job and would cry often after interviews. In a sense I absorbed their pain, and it kept a constant reminder that death was nearby for anyone, including me.

From 2007-2014 I battled the demons of my encounters the hardest. Mentally, I was broken to the core, causing extreme anxiety and depression. I battled it alone and did everything I could to keep it from my family and the Air Force out of fear as to what effect it would have on my career. In 2015 I lost everything to my ex and kids' mother and started fresh in Texas where my parents graciously took me in. I decided I needed God and accepted Christ into my life but was never able to shake my tormented mind. I needed help and my go-to was a mixture of constant drinking and abusing over-the-counter sleep medication. In 2017 I met my soon to be wife who was a nurse. Eventually we moved in together and while my drinking didn't slow, my feelings of emptiness and depression subsided somewhat. Yet she could tell I wasn't right mentally. In 2020 we reached a point where she made me promise to get help. Medically she knew something was off as she would see me fighting in my sleep and deal with my emotional breakdowns and outbursts. I began to know I was battling a problem, but I lived in fear of what asking anyone for help would do to my career, my marriage, and my ability to parent. Despite my desire to seek help my mind deemed it incomprehensible. In January 2022, I finally had the courage to call and ask for help. Not wanting to discuss my problems to a medical provider over the phone, they treated me for the underlying conditions with medication. I was placed on a

waiting list for an outside mental health provider as the Air Force was too undermanned to support the demands of service members in the area. I wanted help sooner than later as my life was spiraling out of control again. In March I sent a follow-up email asking how much longer and was told be patient. A few days later I was arrested.

Despite the emotional problems I endured, my nearly 20-year career in the Air Force allowed me to lead and deliver professional and personal development to 1000's of Airmen and give back to the community. I say this, not to boast, rather to demonstrate that I lived by three principles; to care about others, to make a place better when you left it, and to be an overall productive member of society. Of course now I fully recognize that despite my best efforts as to my service with the Air Force, from a personal point of view my conduct for which I am before you regrettably fell far short of those principles.

While my background demonstrates a piece of who I am, it does not dismiss my actions and the pain I have caused others. Again, I do not have an answer as to what lead me to engage in this conduct, nor do I have a way to fix all the emotional pain and suffering I have cause to these children or their families. With every ounce of my heart, mind, and soul, I am deeply sorry for what I have done and I am committed to changing my behavior. I believe God allows tragedies to happen to some people, so they change their ways. This is where mankind will reach their breaking point and either dwell deeper into sin or be humbled and commit to change. Over the last 11 months, I have recommitted my life to Christ and repented for my actions. I have read the entire bible for the first time in my life and continue to find peace in fellowship and God's word. I pray daily that my victims and their somehow find the same peace. I, Elliott Velez, am committed to change. Not just now, but going forward into my incarceration and the remainder of my life. While incarcerated, I plan to take advantage of every program available to rehabilitate me and allow me to re-enter society as a better person and will faithfully continue with participation in rehabilitative programs upon my return to society.

Your Honor, I am deeply sorry for what I have done. However, I humbly ask for you to consider my whole life, my service history and lack of criminal history when determining my sentence. I have children that need me, a wife that misses me dearly, and a solid support system in place. I have had friends offer me jobs and places to stay upon my release as well. I will strictly comply with the court's requirements and will contribute to society once again given the opportunity. I will not fail! Thank you for taking the time to read my letter your Honor.

Very respectfully,



Elliott Velez